

**FLOOR SPEECH**  
**NOMINATION OF ANDREW WHEELER AS EPA ADMINISTRATOR**  
**February 27, 2019**

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Mr. President. I rise today in support of the growing calls for action on climate change that are echoing in every corner of this nation. The science is overwhelming. The evidence is clear. And unless we take immediate action, we will lose our way of life across the country – and the consequences will be utterly devastating.

Nowhere has more at stake than my home state of New Mexico and the Southwest, which are in the bull's eye of global warming.

Unless we act against greenhouse gas pollution, rising temperatures, drought, wildfire, and deforestation will permanently harm communities across my state and the West.

And so, because I believe in climate science and because I believe that we desperately need to act, I must strongly oppose the confirmation of Andrew Wheeler to lead our nation's Environmental Protection Agency. Mr. Wheeler has consistently advocated for measures that would damage the environment, hurt public health, and do long-term injury to our economy. And his record on climate change – and the record of his administration – are simply disqualifying.

Mr. Wheeler's nomination is among the most backwards in a long line of backwards nominations by this president. For someone who wants to lead the Environmental Protection Agency – the key word being "protection" – Mr. Wheeler's priorities are upside down.

Let's be blunt with the American people. Mr. Wheeler was not nominated to protect the environment and human health.

He was nominated to unravel and undo the environmental protections that are now in place. He was nominated to stop any new environmental protections from being initiated.

He was nominated to go easy on those who violate existing environmental laws. And he was nominated to stand in the way of climate science and climate action.

So far — by these measures — he has been a great success for a president who mocks climate science. Who denies this existential threat even exists.

But there's no success for the American people. Mr. Wheeler's nomination puts the American public at great risk. And we should firmly oppose making his appointment permanent.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wheeler's upside-down priorities don't end at climate change.

In addition to actively resisting climate action, Mr. Wheeler is not looking out for the health and well-being of my constituents or protecting my state's most precious resource — water.

There — like so many other parts of the country — fire foam used by the Air Force has contaminated ground water with toxic chemicals known as PFAS. These chemicals are linked to various cancers, heart disease, and other ailments. Ground water in and around Cannon Air Force, near Clovis, New Mexico, is contaminated with PFAS.

This is dairy country. One dairy is actually being put out of business because the PFAS in ground water have contaminated its water wells. The family that owns the dairy and its hard-working employees have drunk water from the wells for years.

Will a Wheeler EPA help us in this situation? Well, during his confirmation hearings, he refused to commit to setting a drinking water standard. Then later we find out — he had already

decided NOT to set standards for these toxic chemicals in December of last year. Under bipartisan pressure, he has since backed down, and says EPA will set a standard — someday.

In the meantime, millions of Americans and the dairies in eastern New Mexico are being hurt.

Furthermore, Mr. Wheeler is a committed soldier in the long-running assault on science that President Trump has championed.

One of my constituents, Celerah Hewes, wrote this week asking me to vote against this nomination. She writes that, “I grew up in Corrales, surrounded by farmland and fresh air. I remember when the Rio Grande was full of water and the ditches in the bosque flowed freely. Climate change and drought have forever changed the land I call home and my daughter will not remember a time without severe fire danger and ozone pollution.” Celerah wants me to vote no because Mr. Wheeler “is putting our children’s health and future at risk.”

According to the 2018 Fourth National Climate Assessment, we have 12 years to turn this around for Celerah, her daughter, and the world. Soon the impacts will become irreversible.

The previous EPA set rules to reduce carbon pollution from power plants by 32 percent by 2030.

Mr. Wheeler’s new plan will allow INCREASED emissions from fossil fuel plants instead.

He is no better when it comes to even modest standards for methane waste from oil and gas operations. Methane is an extremely potent greenhouse gas – 84 times more potent than carbon dioxide over the initial 20-year period. EPA’s prior methane rules would have cut back methane pollution in a cost-effective way.

Those regulations are out the window under Mr. Wheeler. And replaced with loose rules adding hundreds of thousands of tons of methane, volatile organic compounds, and toxins into the air.

Climate change is the most significant threat facing our planet. EPA is the agency that should be leading the charge on tackling this threat.

But Mr. Wheeler is a former lobbyist for the coal industry. Like so many other nominations, the president has again put the fox in charge of the hen house. This time, the consequences could be disastrous and irreversible for our country and our planet. If we vote to confirm him, there will be little, if any, hope for climate action for the next two years.

Mr. Wheeler leaves no doubt whose side he's on. His record shows that, under his watch, big polluters will get off scot-free.

Companies that pollute often try to reduce their cost of business -- and increase their profits -- by dumping that pollution—and its costs—on society as a whole. When environmental officials fail to enforce the rules against polluters, bad actors get an unfair advantage. Lax environmental enforcement is bad for American businesses who do the right thing. And bad for taxpayers who get stuck with the cleanup bills.

Sadly, Mr. Wheeler's EPA is the poster child for lax enforcement. In 2018, EPA collected the smallest amount of civil penalties against polluters since 1994. Inspections are half of what they were in 2010. EPA charged the fewest criminal defendants since 1991. It saw a steep drop in civil judicial enforcement cases as well. The metrics go on.

So, the best that can be said of Mr. Wheeler's record is that he is not Scott Pruitt. As far as we know, he has not abused taxpayer funds or staff for a variety of luxurious perks or rented his house from a lobbyist. But that bar is so low it's in the Capitol basement.

Indeed, I believe that the EPA under this president has reached an all-time low. There is hardly even any pretense that their goal is to safeguard the environment and human health. They are actively damaging our environment, and actively resisting action on climate change at a time when young people and so many others across New Mexico and this country are crying out for action. We simply must do better.

So I will vote no. And I urge all my colleagues to consider the consequences of this nomination for their children, grandchildren, and beyond -- and to vote no as well.

I yield.